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U.S. Eases Some Curbs on North Korea

By ROBERT PEAR

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31 — The United States announced today that it was relaxing restrictions on trade with, travel to and diplomatic contact with North Korea.

South Korea had requested such steps, and the United States expressed its willingness to consider making such overtures before President Roh Tae Woo of South Korea met with President Reagan at the White House a week and a half ago.

The State Department said today that the purpose of the actions was to support Mr. Roh's efforts to improve relations between North and South Korea, to help draw the North out of its isolation and to persuade it to abandon policies of "confrontation and violence."

Gist of American Proposals

The department spokesman, Charles E. Redman, said the United States is taking four basic steps:

1 The encouraging of unofficial, non-governmental visits by North Koreans to this country for sports and cultural events and for academic purposes.

2 An intended revision by the Treasury Department of current restrictions on travel to North Korea. Each proposed trip, by selected groups of American citizens, will be reviewed separately. The United States will not provide consular services or protection to American citizens traveling there.

3 A review by the Commerce Department of its regulations, so as to permit "certain limited commercial exports of humanitarian goods" from the United States to North Korea. These goods include food, clothing, medical supplies, hand tools and small agricultural equipment.

4 A renewal of permission to American officials to engage in substantive discussions with North Korean officials in neutral settings like United Nations offices or private homes of diplomats from a third country. American diplomats will not go to North Korean diplomatic missions.

No 'Positive Response'

American officials, he added, hope that North Korea will give "a positive, constructive response" to these American steps.

For example, he said, the North might engage in a dialogue with South Korea, could return the remains of Americans unaccounted for in the Korean War, could eliminate "vicious anti-American propaganda" and could take steps to reduce tension in the demilitarized zone. In addition, he said, it should give "credible assurances" that it has abandoned the use of terrorism as "an instrument of state policy."

However, a man who answered the telephone at North Korea's observer mission to the United Nations said he had no immediate comment on the steps announced by the United States. On Oct. 21, North Korea said it was not enough for Washington to relax trade and travel restrictions if it did not also agree to discuss the withdrawal of American troops from South Korea.

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with North Korea and has not designated any country to represent its interests in Pyongyang, the North's capital. American officials said there was still a state of belligerency between the two countries dating from the Korean War, despite the armistice signed in 1953.

Many South Korean students have also demanded withdrawal of American troops from their country, but Mr. Redman said today that the possibility of reducing American forces there was "very, very, very far downstream."

The United States allowed some diplomatic contacts with North Korea in September 1983 and March 1987, but prohibited new ones after receiving evidence that the North was responsible for the sabotage of a South Korean airliner over Burma in November 1987.

The United States still prohibits general commercial trade with the Pyongyang Government, and Mr. Redman

said today that North Korea "remains on our list of states which support or are engaged in international terrorism."

At the end of the Korean War, 8,177 American servicemen were unac-

counted for, Mr. Redman said. In late 1987, North Korea told the United States that it had the remains of five American soldiers, and the United States would like to arrange for their return.